

February 20, 1971

**Mr. Jeffrey Ling
First Secretary
British Embassy**

DOS REVIEWED 19-Aug-2010: NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION

Dear Jeffrey:

The enclosed letter from General Haig to Mr. Armstrong is in response to the letter which was hand delivered to General Haig on February 17th. I would appreciate your forwarding it to Mr. Armstrong.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Houdak

REFER TO DOS

CONFIDENTIAL

February 18, 1971

Dear Mr. Armstrong:

Thank you for your letter of February 8 which was delivered to me by hand yesterday. I, of course, remember very well our conversation of February 3 and the subsequent arrangements made for the telephone discussion between the Prime Minister and the President. Preparations for the discussion required the provision of background material to the President and the allocation of a specific hour for the call on the President's calendar.

Although we anticipated that the Prime Minister's call would be processed through the secure channel, at the last minute the President preferred to conduct the discussion on an open line. His decision was merely a manifestation of personal preference for the channel in which he feels more comfortable. Unfortunately, with the last-minute shift here, it may have appeared that there was some confusion at this end.

I want to assure you that there are no technical problems with the secure system which served us so well during your call to me and during earlier calls between Downing Street and the White House at the time of the Jordanian crisis. There was certainly no failure on your part in the processing of the call. The sole problem was the unexpected decision of the President to conduct the conversation on an open line. In the future, I think we will have to keep the President's preference in mind when the sensitivity of issues is marginal. We can remain assured that the secure line is operative for those occasions when there is absolutely no alternative. In such cases, we will simply have to do a better job of making this clear to the President.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-2-

I am very sorry if the unforeseen change here caused difficulties at your end, and am most grateful that you took the trouble to review our procedures.

Best regards,

151

Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
Brigadier General, U. S. Army
Deputy Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

Mr. Robert Armstrong
Principal Private Secretary
to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Whitehall, London, England

CONFIDENTIAL

AMH:mlh:typed 2-18-71